Migrants and Disempowered Cities: Opportunities and Challenges

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Two striking Characteristics of scholarship on the relationship between migrants and cities

- Generating theory and policies from the particular experiences of metropoles or gateway cities, ignoring the differing dynamics in cities of varying scale.
  - We need to counter this tendency (methodological nationalism) of most of migration and policy studies.

- Urban redevelopment narratives mask growing inequalities in and between cities.
  - We need to address the interrelated processes of wealth generation through urban redevelopment, increasing disparities, and migrant settlement.

Countering these tendencies

- Focusing on cities of varying size, scale, and power
  - Disempowered cities (marked by decimated economies, loss of population, tax base, economic, political and cultural power).

- Developing a new analytical vocabulary
  - To capture the interdependencies between the dispossessive processes and displacements underlying urban redevelopment that often remain veiled in studies on the relationships between migrants and cities

The building blocks of a new conceptual network

- *Displacement* rather than "mobility"
  - Enables us to draw attention to the processes underlying migration
    - Displacement dispossession and accumulation
    - How seemingly independent processes and locations as well as institutions are ultimately connected with each other

- Emplacement – a processual concept
  - "The relationship between the continuing restructuring of place within multiscalar networks of power, and a person's efforts, within the barriers and opportunities that contingencies of local place-making offer, to build a life within networks of local, national, supranational, and global interconnections"

Moving beyond Binaries

- Approaching the dynamics of migrants and those who see themselves as natives in city-making within the same analytical framework
  - Addressing common conditions of precarity and displacement many urban residents are subject to
  - Situating migrants as contemporaries of all other urban residents
    - (coevalness – historical conjuncture)

Utility of Focusing on Disempowered Cities

- Disempowered – in terms of access to national power, capital investments, global talent - position within global networks of power - limited resources and power

- The *multiple ways* migrants contribute to city-making can be more readily studied

- New insights into the different *opportunities* for migrant emplacement

- Fault lines of neoliberal urban redevelopment - contradictions and effects of dispossessions and displacements underlying urban regenerations become more visible

- Migrant friendly narratives of leaders

The broader context of strategies and policies of urban redevelopment

- Cities – unleashing - as engines of economy, centers of trade, investment and innovation
  - Restructuring of capital - the changing configurations of state and local power
  - Altering the value regimes in cities. All urban resources acquire a new value
  - Migrants and refugees become assets
  - attracting capital and investment to the city
    - performing the safe, open, and business friendly environment of the city (countering the city's image as dangerous, declining and racist)

Findings – Similarities

- Migrant friendly narratives closely entangled with business (capital – foreign, multinational) friendly narratives in urban redevelopment

- No migrant-specific policies, but incentives to attract capital and investments (subsidies, tax rebates, provision of public resources to corporate capital)

- Urban development by public expenditure- contributing to corporate coffers
  - increased debt
  - fewer public services
  - increased poverty

Opportunities and Challenges

- Two contradictory developments
  1. Lack of resources and and programmes for the institutionalization of (ethnic and religious) difference - opportunities for migrants, refugees and the natives to build sociabilities based on domains of commonality-local politics
     - Striking examples of migrants in local politics, in social justice movements
  2. Increased racism – migrants as the scapegoat of the effects of dispossessive dynamics of urban restructuring - failing public services, impoverishment